

Status of Women in Medieval India

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Abstract - During the middle Ages, women's standing started to deteriorate. The Muslim era was prevalent throughout this time period. Women's life was drastically altered during this time period. They were seen to be inferior to their masculine counterparts. The birth of female offspring was frowned upon. During this time, the ladies were forced to deal with a variety of issues. Children marriage, the purdah system, sati, jauhar, and restrictions on girls' education were among the challenges that women faced, leading to a decrease in their status. Furthermore, elements were implemented that resulted in improvements in their condition. These include education, job possibilities, and skill and ability enhancements, all of which would make a substantial contribution to improving their lives. As a result, it is vital for leaders and reformers to establish policies that will help to eliminate the issues and impediments that women face. There are the several topics covered in article, significant problems faced by women in medieval India, elements emphasising women's position in medieval India, and importance of a Bhakti movement on the status of women.

Keywords - Medieval India, Women, Problems

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INTRODUCTION

Invasion of India by Muslim invaders heralds the start of the medieval era in India, which lasted around The Delhi Sultanate, was in power for 500 years to the reign of the Mughal Empire. During the Muslim era, women's standing began to deteriorate. Women's life was drastically altered during this time period. [1]

The practices of female feticide and female infanticide were common in certain civilizations. These are considered horrible behaviours, implying that the birth of female offspring was not valued. There are also additional customs, such as sati and child marriage, that indicate women's disadvantaged position. Widows were permitted to remarry, which was one of the most common rituals. Male members were given precedence at this time. Males were seen to be the family's most valuable asset. They will be able to enhance their competences and talents if their parents pay close attention to numerous elements and encourage their upbringing in an acceptable way. When the male members of the family have an education, they will be able to make a significant difference in the lives of their families and communities. As a result, Higher education was advocated for guys. On the other hand, girls were regarded as liabilities. They were taught how to handle household chores and respond to the wishes and expectations of family members. They were discouraged from going to school since it was considered that they would be unable to apply their educational qualifications, talents, and abilities in their married homes. They'll be able to show that their parents instilled in them values that are vital to their families' well-being. If they carry out home

chores and meet the wants and requirements of family members in a suitable way. [2]

WOMEN DURING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The Medieval era was a disappointment for Indian women, since their standing fell even further at this time. From the 7th to the 9th centuries A.D., Women's culture and position were at an all-time high, as can be shown. Even women from lower socioeconomic classes had access to liberal education and training in the fine arts (particularly painting, music, and versification). Rajyashree (the famed monarch Harshvardhana's sister) was a Buddhist, and her opinion was requested on a number of significant issues. Poetesses, princesses, daughters of influential officials, courtesans, and concubines and scientists are mentioned by Rajshekhar (Kavya-Mimamsa). Avantisundari, the poet Rajshekhar's wife, was a very talented lady. Hemachandra cites three of her stanzas from Rajshekhar's Karpurmanjari, which was written at her request. This era's plays and prose romances also reflect the current condition of learning among women. Court women, especially the queen's maids-in-waiting, have demonstrated their ability to write superb Sanskrit and Prakrit poetry. Shila Mahadevi, the wife of Rashtrakuta ruler Dhruva, most likely reigned alongside her husband and had the power to bestow great gifts. Orissa was governed by many queens from the Kara dynasty as dowager queens, Sugandha and Didda of Kashmir ruled vast realms. [3]

The preaching of Upadishism, Buddhism, and Jainism began to spread, and widows' position was severely impacted.

Widows' remarriage was prohibited, and they were encouraged to live austere lives at home. The widow's tonsure (head shaving) was imposed by the ninth century A.D., and the purdah system was commonly utilised in middle class households. During the medieval era, women's standing deteriorated dramatically.[4]

MAJOR PROBLEM EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

During the Mughal Empire, the status of women in Indian society changed dramatically. The evolution of social laws and practises resulted in changes in features that reflected advancements in women's position. Women's intellectual culture differed depending on their social level. Women in rural regions were generally living in deplorable circumstances, with little space to foster their cultural and social growth. The primary focus of rural women was on their household obligations. They were mostly involved in agricultural and farming techniques, home tasks, taking care of their family members' wants and requirements, and engaging in certain recreational and leisure activities. Women from the higher classes were interested in honing their talents and abilities. They also registered in educational institutions and training centres in order to further their education. [5]

Women in the middle ages experienced a variety of issues, which are addressed below:

Sati

"Sati" refers to the ceremony of dying on the husband's funeral pyre. According to Hindu scripture, women who die on their husband's funeral pyre go straight to paradise, thus it's a good idea to follow this tradition. Women were not required to do so at first, but those who did were considered highly esteemed members of society. Sati was seen as a preferable alternative than widowhood in Hindu society since widows' fate was substantially worse. Some literature, like as 'Medhatiti,' take contrary positions, claiming that Sati is suicide and should be avoided.

Jauhar

In some aspects, it's like Sati, only it's a mass suicide. In Rajput communities, jauhar was commonly employed. Under this rite, while their spouses were still alive, ladies set themselves on fire. When the Rajput clan realised they were about to die at the hands of their adversary, they constructed a massive pyre and set themselves on fire, leaving their spouse to fight the enemy in the "Shaka," the ultimate and conclusive

fight. Consequently, the women's and the clan's holiness is preserved.

Child Marriage

In medieval India, this was a regular practise. Girls were married off at the age of 8-10. They were not allowed to go to school and were seen as little more than garbage. "Dhol, gawar, shudra, pashu, nari, ye sab tadan ke adhikari," writes Tulsidas in one of his shlokas, describing the plight of women. For example, animals, illiterates, inferior castes, and women all deserve to be beaten. Women were compared to animals as a result, and they were married off at a young age. Child marriage introduced a flood of new concerns, including an increase in the birth rate, poor women's health due to recurrent childbirth, and a high death rate for both mothers and children.

Prohibition of Widow Remarriage

In medieval India, widows had a particularly difficult time. They were not treated like humans and were subjected to several limitations. After their spouse died, they were expected to live a holy life and were not permitted to participate in any celebrations. It was thought that their appearance in any excellent effort was a bad omen. Widows' heads were sometimes shaved as well. They were not permitted to marry again. Remarrying a woman was frowned upon by society. One of the main reasons for the large number of women who commit Sati is poverty was the brutality shown to widows. Being a Hindu widow in medieval India was considered a misfortune.

Purdah System

The purdah system refers to a women's custom covering their faces and upper bodies with a garment or veil. In Medieval India, it was a widespread practise among Muslims. It is still done today. This method was exclusively used by the rich and regal classes of Hindus before to the Muslim conquest of India. However Hindu women were also forced to wear the 'purdah' following the Muslim conquest, mostly to protect themselves from Muslim males and to avoid being abducted or deceived.

In Medieval India, especially in Hindu society, girls did not have access to formal education. They were taught how to perform household chores. In Muslim civilization, on the other hand, certain rulers, such as Akbar, built separate schools for girls. For exercises in the fine arts, tutors were assigned. Sultana Raziya, Gulbadan Begum (Babur's daughter), Salima Sultana (another Babur daughter), Mohan Anaga (Akbar's foster

mother), Nurjahan, Mumtaj Mahal, and others were also supporters of study.

Girl Education

Girls did not have access to formal education in medieval India, notably in Hindu society. They were taught how to perform household chores. Women, on the other hand, were supposed to be skilled in sixty-four abilities, including cooking, spinning, grinding, medical knowledge, reciting, and many more, according to a great Indian philosopher named 'Vatsyayana.'

Attending school and obtaining an education was discouraged for the females. The reason for this is that kids will not be able to get training in the application of many sorts of domestic tasks if they attend school. The major reason for this is because their parents are concerned that they will be unable to put their knowledge, talents, and abilities to good use in their married homes. Obtaining an education necessitated expenditures. The parents came to the conclusion that spending their financial resources on schooling would be a waste, so they organised their finances and set aside money for their daughters' marriages.

Devdasis

It was a common practise in Southern India at the time. Girls were devoted to temples in the name of gods and goddesses under this system. The females were thereafter dubbed 'Devadasis,' which means 'servant of God.' These Devadasis were intended to be celibate for the rest of their lives. The donations provided to the temples satisfied all of Devadasis' conditions. They used to spend their time at the temple singing and dancing for the deity and worshipping him. Some kings used to amuse their courtiers by inviting temple dancers to perform at their court, and as a result, various Devadasis became Rajadasis (palace dancers), who are found in some South Indian tribes such as the Yellamma culture.

In the words of famous poet Rabindranath Tagore, Women's status in medieval India and at the start of modern India may be summarised as follows: "Why, Lord, haven't you given woman the power to choose her own destiny? Why does she have to stand by the wayside, head down, waiting with worn patience, hoping for a miracle the next day?"

Polygamy

Polygamy is defined as having many spouses at the same time, i.e. having several husbands or wives. In Medieval India, polygamous marriages were frequent. Polygamy is divided into two types: Polygyny refers to when a man marries many women, whereas polyandry refers to when a woman marries multiple men. The practise of polygamy was common in ancient India. However, it is unknown if

they were accepted within society. This was a common practise among military groups and affluent commercial classes. Various causes affected this practise in medieval India, including individual opinions, status symbols, and social, moral, and religious obligations. In traditional Hinduism, marriage was essentially for the sake of procreation and the carrying out of obligations and responsibilities. In addition to their domestic obligations, the couples provided support and aid to one another. [6]

IMPROVEMENTS IN WOMEN'S STATUS IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

It is well accepted that families and communities may grow and flourish in a sustainable way, and the society in its entirety is impossible without treating women with respect and decency. They should be given opportunity to better themselves and their life. Women will be able to make a significant contribution to the families and communities are growing and developing the country in its entirety if they are permitted to voice their thoughts and opinions. Individuals in families and communities must realise that women should not be restricted to their houses or kept in purdah, but rather should be observed in public [7]. The following are some of the criteria that indicate that women's status is improving:

Obtaining an Education

By gaining knowledge, individuals will be able to get a better grasp of the tactics and procedures required to live a well-ordered life and attain personal and professional goals. As a result, when women are educated they will be able to contribute significantly to their families' and communities' well-being. As a result, women needed to be encouraged to pursue higher education. As a result, it is widely recognised that obtaining an education not only enhances one's knowledge and abilities, but it is also viewed as a significant aspect in demonstrating that women's standing is improving. [8]

Employment Opportunities Participation

Agriculture and agricultural activities were the main sources of income in rural communities. Women were encouraged to work on artworks, handicrafts, ceramics, silk weaving, food production, and livestock management, and other occupations in addition to agriculture and farming. Girls have been encouraged to participate in these activities since early childhood in order to contribute to their families' and communities' well-being. As a result, it's easy to see why women's involvement in work prospects is viewed as a significant aspect in demonstrating that their status is improving.

Participation in Decision Making Process

Individuals must make decisions on a variety of elements in their life, such as education, work possibilities, household management, child development, and so on. When women are given the freedom to voice their opinions and thoughts, when they are heard by when they are able to better their status in comparison to their male counterparts As a result, women's engagement in personal and professional decision-making processes has increased might be considered as a sign that their status is increasing on a broad scale.

Participation in Various Activities

One of the most important components is women's engagement in social, cultural, economic, and religious activities that have contributed significantly to their improved position. These should be fostered in both natal and marital families. The fundamental reason for this is that by Individuals that participate in these activities will not only increase their abilities, talents, and knowledge, but they will also be better equipped to contribute to the advancement of their position. As a result social, cultural, economic, and religious activities involvement is seen as a measure that shows women's status is improving on a broad scale. [9]

Encouraging Empowerment Opportunities

Various factors must be considered when encouraging empowerment opportunities, such as education, Opportunities for employment, involvement in decision-making processes, engagement in a variety of activities, upgrading skills and talents, expressing views and perspectives, associating with others, fostering public observation, and so on. Women will be empowered and their general quality of life will increase if they are encouraged to engage in various jobs and responsibilities. As a result, it's easy to see how promoting female empowerment will help to enhance women's standing.

Curbing the Societal Problems

Girls' educational constraints, child marriage, the purdah system, sati, and jauhar were all factors that contributed to women's status being lowered. It is critical to address these issues in order to improve women's standing. There was a need to adopt changes and establish policies that would help to address social issues. Women's growth and development will be more effective if these are curtailed. As a result, one may admit that addressing societal issues is a critical aspect in demonstrating that women's position is improving. [10]

Promoting Public Sight

The purdah system suggested women's separation from observation by the general public through the use of clothes, within their homes, they have high-

walled enclosures, screens, and curtains enclosures with thick walls, screens, and curtains are also available. The purdah system has been abolished will go a long way toward encouraging observation by the general public. When Women are encouraged to take part in public activities, they are more likely to pursue possibilities for empowerment and enhance their overall quality of life. As a result, it is reasonable to conclude that encouraging public observation is an important aspect in emphasising the fact that changes are being made in the status of women from various areas, classifications, and origins.

Encouraging Communication Skills Improvement

It is self-evident that everyone wants to communicate and convey their ideas and opinions. Women will be able to increase their ability to communicate when they are consulted and given opportunity to share their opinions. They will be able to boost their position if their male colleagues as well as other women listen to what they have to say. As a result, encouraging women to enhance their communication skills would help them not only increase their position, but also build a social group. [11]

Creating information in terms of managing functions

Information planning, organisation, direction, leadership, and coordination in terms of management functions and regulating are seen to be important in improving women's status. Women will be well-equipped in terms of management tasks both inside and outside the house when they are given opportunity to do well and improve not just their work obligations, but also their general quality of life. These are put into effect in the execution of family chores as well as other activities and functions, such as job possibilities, education, and household responsibilities, to name a few. As a result, creating knowledge in terms of management duties is beneficial and useful for women in terms of improving their position.

Developing Creative Talents

Women should be encouraged to develop creative skills such as artwork, handicrafts, ceramics, silk weaving, food creation, musical instrument playing, singing, dancing, and role acting. Women will be able to put their qualities and skills to good use in one or more of these areas to promote greater livelihood chances if they concentrate on improving their skills and abilities in at least one of these fields. When one is able to effectively increase the competences and abilities required to maintain their living situations, they will be able to better their situation. As a result, it can be claimed that developing creative talents is an important aspect in

demonstrating that women's position is improving. [12]

WOMEN'S STRUGGLE AND SOCIAL REFORMERS

Despite the fact that Indian women are not keeping up with their Western counterparts, they are trying hard to make a name for themselves in a male-dominated environment. We may be able to select a few British Indian women who set an example of incredible fortitude that even men may not be able to equal. One such woman was Jhansi's Rani Lakshmi Bai. She was the one who put even British monarchs to disgrace in combat with her incredible accomplishments. She battled for her country, which had been illegally taken by British Governor General Dalhousie. In many ways, she was the genuine leader of the 1857 rebellion. In India, there are several males who have championed the cause of women. Social reformers like as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, Swami Vivekananda, and Swami Dayanand Saraswathi have aided women in regaining their prior social rank. [13]

Raja Ram Mohan Roy

He was the forerunner of women's rights, having been born on May 22, 1772. He was an outspoken opponent of the societal evils of the period. He is the one who has done a great favour to women by making Sati illegal. Lord William Bentinck prohibited the Sati custom in 1829 as a result of his efforts. Although this regulation was not a strong deterrent, it did influence people's attitudes to some extent. Ram Mohan Roy also made significant contributions to education of women. He was an outspoken opponent of child marriage and a proponent of widow remarriage. He also married a widow, establishing an example for the entire society. He co-founded "Brahma Samaj" with "Dwarkanath Tagore" for the reformation of Indian society and women's emancipation.

Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar

Vidyasagar, which means "sea of wisdom," was Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's nickname. He was indeed the sea of knowledge, living up to his reputation. He was a key figure in Bengal's 19th-century social reform movement. He studied old Hindu scriptures extensively and discovered that the gender difference that existed in Bengal was not written in our ancient traditions; rather, it was a political decision to make women submissive to males. In Bengal, He was a strong advocate for women's education, going door to door to persuade families to send their female children to school. He also contributed significantly to the topic of widow remarriage. He founded a number of females' schools.

Jyotirao Phule

Jyotirao Govind Rao Phule, who was born in Pune on April 11, 1827, was a true philanthropist. He was responsible for the establishment of India's first women's school. He is also credited for establishing the first upper-caste widows' home and a facility for newborn girl children to combat female infanticide.

Dayanand Saraswathi

"Return to the Vedas!" he exclaimed as the founder of the Arya Samaj. He translated the Vedas from Sanskrit to Hindi so that a common man might understand the significance of women in Vedic Hindu teachings. He underlined the need of women having equal rights in all fields. With his Vedic teachings, he attempted to influence people's thinking.

Mahatma Gandhi

Women's independence was paved by nineteenth-century social reformers, but the impact of Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi was significant that brought these improvements to the people. He was the one who broke the chains of 'Purdah' and other types of societal tyranny for Indian women. He freed them from their captivity and invited them to join the fight for independence. Women must be freed from the shackles of the kitchen, he believes, before their entire potential can be fulfilled. He stated that while domestic responsibility is vital for women, it shouldn't be the most important. In truth, she should take the initiative to share the nation's responsibilities. When Gandhi arrived on the scene of the Indian freedom struggle, Women in India lived an average of 27 years and only 2% were educated, demonstrating what a Herculean struggle it was to get women who were denied fundamental rights to fight for the country's cause. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kriplani, and Sarojini Naidu are among the ladies who have come out as a consequence of his efforts. He disseminated the concept of gender equality to the populace and chastised Indians for preferring to have a male kid over a girl one. Gandhiji was an outspoken opponent of child marriage and a supporter of widow remarriage. He encouraged young people to take risks and invite young widows into their lives as life partners. He claimed that women are capable of accomplishing whatever that boy are capable of, but that the time has come for them to demonstrate their abilities. When India attained independence, it was mainly due to his efforts that Women's 'right to vote' came naturally to them, despite the fact that it was not so in other developed countries such as England and America, women only won this right much later and after much controversy. [14]

IMPACT OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Women's standing continued to deteriorate throughout the middle Ages. However, there were

certain changes in the social environment between the 4th and 15th centuries.

During this time, Ramanujacharya established the first Bhakti Movement, which brought new trends in women's social and religious lives in India. Women's religious rights were championed by Saints like as Chaitanya, Nanak, Meera, Kabir, Ramdas, Tulsidas, and Tukaram are well-known. Though the Bhakti movement had no aim of drastically altering the position of Indian women, it did open the door to religious liberty for them.

They were able to obtain some social freedom as a result of this liberation. The system of purdah was eliminated. Women might leave their homes to participate in pravachanas, harikathas, kirtans (religious prayers), bhajans, and dharmic utsavs, among other things. The value of Grihasthashrama was emphasised by the Bhakti movement, and As a result, saints could only enter'sanyasa' with their spouses' permission. Women gained several key rights as a result of this situation. Women were encouraged to study holy texts and educate themselves by the saints of the Bhakti movement.

The Bhakti movement provided women a fresh lease on life, as the preceding explanation demonstrates. However, because the economic basis of society did not alter as a result of this movement, women's place in society remained low.

CONCLUSION

During the Muslim era, women's standing began to deteriorate. They had to deal with a variety of issues that posed barriers to their successful growth and development. Women's life was drastically altered during this time period. In comparison to their male counterparts, women were thought to be inferior. Child marriage, the purdah system, sati, jauhar, and limits on girls' education were all factors that contributed to women's status being lowered. Education, participation in employment opportunities, participation in decision-making processes, participation in various activities, encouraging empowerment opportunities, addressing societal issues, encouraging public observation, encouraging communication skill upgrades, generating information in terms of managerial functions, and practising creative skills are some of the factors that show that women's status is improving. Finally, it can be concluded that women's standing in medieval India fell, but with the implementation of reforms by kings and leaders, their status improved.

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